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A Compendium of Recent Insurgency Analyses

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Moscow's intervention in Azerbaijan in January 1990 dampened interethnic violence in the region but added to an already growing nationalist consciousness among Azeris. The Kremlin is now implementing policies aimed at forestalling the development of an insurgency in Azerbaijan, but its prospects are still uncertain. Several indicators may be watched to aid in analyzing future developments.

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USSR: Prospects for an Insurgency in Azerbaijan

An Uneasy Calm

Preconditions for an insurgency in Azerbaijan have developed rapidly since last fall. Moscow's military intervention has suppressed the overt manifestations of an insurgency but has added a new, more violent aspect to anti-Moscow sentiment in the republic. The longer Moscow continues its occupation without making political concessions to the Azeri People's Front (APF), the more difficulty the Front leaders will have in controlling radical elements that have shown the will and the ability to use insurgent tactics. Our analysis of insurgencies has identified several indicators—

—that would help in monitoring the emergence of an anti-Moscow insurgency in Azerbaijan.

Moscow's January 1990 military intervention in Azerbaijan was prompted primarily by the Azeri nationalists' threat to overthrow the republic regime, as well as by growing ethnic violence. The Armenian-Azeri conflict, which sparked the growth of Azeri nationalism, began in early 1988 over the sovereignty of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹ A group of Azeri intellectuals formed the APF in early 1989, partially in response to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute but also as a way to promote political reform in Azerbaijan. Since then, the APF's goals have expanded to include independence for the republic. As tension with the Armenians grew, two factions developed within the APF—radicals, who seek immediate independence, and moderates, who advocate a more gradual approach. In early January 1990, the radicals took control of the Front, incited a pogrom against Armenians in Baku, and began planning a takeover of republic leadership. In response to these developments, Moscow intervened militarily on 20 January.

¹ For further information on the historical roots of the disputes and events in the Transcaucasus region before mid-1988, see DI Research Paper SOV 88-10059CYC.

² August 1988, *Unrest in the Caucasus and the Challenge of Nationalism*.

The Kremlin's actions calmed the situation for the moment. Soviet troops killed at least 140 Azeris in the crackdown, and the regime arrested many of the radical leaders of the APF, returning the more moderate leaders to control. Calls for independence died down, and cease-fire talks between Armenian and Azeri nationalists began. The situation remains volatile, however: violence between Azeris and Armenians continues, the deaths of Azeri civilians at Soviet hands are a fresh memory, and the security presence in Baku—some 15,000 to 20,000 MVD and regular troops—remains high.

Fertile Ground for Insurgency

Given recent developments and current conditions, Azerbaijan is a fertile ground for the development of a domestic insurgency.² A number of conditions or predisposing factors underscore this potential:

- *Nationalism and religion.* Nationalist insurgencies against regimes perceived to represent foreign occupiers can draw on a broad and determined base of support and be difficult to quell. Over the last two years, Azeri nationalism has grown exponentially. Some of the once predominantly secular Azeris have begun to show signs of renewed interest in Islam; in one of the most radicalized areas of the republic, Nakhichevan³, Islamic slogans have become the rallying call.
- *A conducive political climate.* Academic and intelligence studies indicate that insurgencies and other revolutionary movements often gain momentum when promised reforms do not meet expectations.

² We define insurgency as a protracted political-military struggle directed toward completely or partially controlling a region or country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organization. Insurgent activity—which includes guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and political mobilization—is designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy.

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and central governments are perceived as weak or indecisive. Although Azeri complaints are longstanding, the recent loosening of Moscow's control and growth of independence movements elsewhere in the USSR have given rise to the perception that central authority can successfully be challenged—as has been the case repeatedly in the Baltic states. Although Moscow's intervention in Baku has demonstrated that it is willing to put down violent moves against its authority, its tolerance for peaceful organizational activities gives potential insurgent groups breathing space for political organizing.

- *Population pressures.* Past cases indicate that large-scale dislocations of people can stimulate civil unrest. About 200,000 Azeris who fled Armenian areas are homeless and jobless, living in tent cities near Baku and Nakhichevan'. Press reports indicate that this group was the most active in the January violence. If the refugees are not absorbed into Azerbaijan, they could become a recruiting pool for anti-Moscow and anti-Armenian action.
- *Favorable geography.* The geography of Azerbaijan is favorable for the development of an insurgency. The terrain is rugged and largely undeveloped, providing concealment and handicapping government deployments. Azerbaijan's border with Iran is difficult to police, and sketchy evidence indicates the Azeri population in northern Iran might provide a support network.

Challenges for Both Sides

Moscow

Moscow's decisions will be the greatest single variable determining whether or not an insurgency develops in Azerbaijan. The Kremlin now faces the choice of a prolonged occupation of Azerbaijan or turning over effective control of the republic to the APF. An occupation that could maintain order would be costly in both rubles and manpower. Unless these resources are complemented by a political strategy to defuse the mounting nationalist fervor, Azeri organizations are likely to search for new ways to apply pressure. Soviet forces would be vulnerable to hit-and-run raids,

sabotage, and other acts—including assassinations of Soviet officers—that would heighten the pain of occupation and discredit Moscow's claim of maintaining order.

Moscow appears to be aware of these possibilities and is pursuing a political as well as a military strategy. It is encouraging talks with moderates, while still maintaining a heavy military presence in Baku. Moscow will probably, in the long term, be willing to allow moderate Front members to take charge. The regime has not blocked the appointment of the new republic premier, who is an ally of the Front, and Moscow has encouraged direct talks between moderate Front leaders and the military commandant in Baku. If the moderates can maintain their hold over the APF, these moves will greatly lessen the chances of an insurgency.

Continuing occupation or a move to suppress moderate Front leaders, however, could be a catalyst for an insurgency. By talking to the APF, Moscow has conferred political legitimacy upon it. Furthermore, local guerrilla groups will continue to operate against Armenian targets. These units could become the core for recruiting and training a larger force to fight Moscow if a political settlement were not found or if Moscow were to renege on its pledges to allow more political autonomy in Azerbaijan.

The Front

On the Azeri side, the balance between APF moderates and extremists will also be a key to whether or not an anti-Moscow insurgency develops in Azerbaijan. Prior to the extremists gaining power in the Front, anti-Moscow and anti-Soviet feeling in the republic ran a distant second to anti-Armenian feeling. Anti-Soviet feeling is much stronger in the aftermath of the intervention and will grow if Moscow is perceived as frustrating Azeri objectives. This will increase popular sympathy for the radicals. However, until anti-Moscow sentiment replaces anti-Armenian emotions as the driving force for violence, the radicals will probably be unable to gain sufficient popular support for a prolonged insurgency.

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Known Nationalist Groups in Azerbaijan

	<i>Remarks</i>
<i>Azerbaijan Peoples' Front</i>	<i>Founded in early 1989 by intellectuals and appears to have branches throughout Azerbaijan, possibly including military units; effectively controls republic's politics; temporarily taken over by radicals in January 1990; cell has an executive council.</i>
<i>Birlik (Unity)</i>	<i>Goal is Pan-Islamic state and unity of Soviet and Iranian Azeris. Some grassroots sympathy from industrial workers; has worked with APF since at least August 1989.</i>
<i>Brothers of Religion</i>	<i>Fundamentalist Muslims; have agreed to work with APF moderates to gain autonomy for Azerbaijan.</i>
<i>National Liberation</i>	<i>Described by dissident Movement of Azerbaijan sources as radical, anti-(Milli Gurulush) Soviet; goal is to create pluralist society in Azerbaijan; claims 3,000 members, branches throughout Azerbaijan; many members drawn from Azeri refugees from Armenia.</i>

Moderate APF leaders are currently in control in Baku, but they have not yet reined in extremists on the periphery, particularly in Nakhichevan'. If the Front in Nakhichevan' adopts a more moderate line, backing away from its declaration of independence, then the chances for an insurgency will be appreciably reduced. If the Nakhichevan' Front remains radicalized, however, the region could become a center for anti-Moscow organizing, although its location, separate from the rest of Azerbaijan, would make it more useful for political work than for military activities.

Developments That Could Signal an Insurgency

The current situation in Azerbaijan already meets some preconditions for an insurgency. Despite the continuing presence of large numbers of Soviet troops, extremist activities have not been completely stamped out. Press reporting indicates that some APF members have gone underground and are publishing leaflets calling for armed struggle against Moscow; reports of sniping, attacks on military patrols, and

discoveries of arm caches are also continuing. Although these activities are on a much smaller scale than before 20 January, their continuation indicates that the situation remains volatile and that some extremists remain committed to the use of violence, including insurgent tactics against Moscow.

On the basis of our analysis of insurgencies, we have identified a number of developments that would probably presage a full-blown insurgency. The indicators associated with each would also provide insights into the strength and staying power of such a rebel movement.

Insurgent Organization

An insurgency requires *organization* and *central coordination* as well as a *consensus on key goals* among its members. In the case of the Azeris, a framework for an insurgent organization already exists. The APF has become an umbrella organization made up of several different groups, including some with more radical goals (see inset). The Front has cells throughout the republic that appear to act on the orders of

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leaders in Baku. We do not know, however, how firm the leaders' control really is or if moderate leaders will be able to control the radicals and maintain their authority as Soviet troop strength is drawn down. Any *reluctance to try to control the radicals* may itself be an indicator of a nascent insurgency. Although moderates and radicals are largely united on the goal of eventual independence, they differ on timing and willingness to take up arms against Moscow.

External Support

The growth of an insurgency can be accelerated by supplementing local support with *arms, money, and political support from outside interests*. In our view, an Azeri revolutionary movement would draw widespread sympathy and recruits from the general population. Sustained efforts by a well-organized, centrally directed Azeri movement would also have a good chance of finding unofficial foreign support and developing *clandestine aid networks* to augment this base. Front members are building diplomatic and economic ties to Muslim countries, primarily Iran and Turkey, and are seeking to have the republic's constitution mandate special diplomatic relationships with those two states.

Azeri nationalists, including at least one Front leader, have traveled to the United States to seek support from Azeri emigres; a significant *increase in such missions* would be a telling indicator that an insurgency is developing.

An effective military challenge to the Soviets would require that the Azeris *obtain increased numbers of sophisticated arms*. Soviet press reports claim that many Azeris already have light machineguns, rocket launchers, and mortars and have even captured some

armored vehicles. Although these stocks would enable the Azeris to carry out hit-and-run raids and do limited damage to Soviet forces, they are not sufficient to enable them to move beyond random attacks or brief defensive actions. To our knowledge, the Azeris have not yet begun *organized weapons acquisition abroad*; such activity—including the purchase of articles used to make common insurgent weapons, such as homemade landmines—or the *discovery of delivery routes* from Iran or Turkey would signal the emergence of a well-organized and financed insurgent effort.

Militarization

The development of an insurgency in Azerbaijan would require a transition from mob violence and random terrorism to organized military action. The Azeris appear to have developed a military organization well-suited for rural skirmishes against similar Armenian units but not against regular Soviet forces. Press reporting indicates that APF leaders tried to recruit Azeri conscripts and officers from the Soviet army to fight Armenians last fall, and an unconfirmed press item reported Azeri guerrilla training camps in the mountains outside Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite the formation of a Defense Council and the apparent naming of a Minister of War by APF radicals, the Azeri resistance in Baku in January appears to have been poorly organized, indicating that the APF was not yet prepared for urban warfare or to fight against the better trained and equipped Soviet forces. Simultaneous attacks on several targets would indicate a high degree of central coordination and that training and weapons problems are being addressed.

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Chronology of the Armenian-Azeri Conflict

1921-23	<i>New Soviet Government makes Nagorno-Karabakh—historically an Armenian area—an autonomous region within the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.</i>	September 1989	<i>Azeri Peoples' Front leads general strike and rail blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia... Azerbaijan Government gives official recognition to Front.</i>
Late 1987	<i>Armenians reopen issue of reunion with Nagorno-Karabakh... Armenian ecology agitation suddenly shifts to mass demonstrations on the issue.</i>	October 1989	<i>Rail blockade ends after regime sends additional troops to escort trains and makes concessions to Azeris... communal violence continues.</i>
February 1988	<i>Demonstrations in Yerevan 500,000 strong... riots in Sumgait, Azerbaijan cost 32 lives... mass exodus of Armenians and Azeri refugees from the two republics... strikes begin in Nagorno-Karabakh.</i>	November 1989	<i>USSR Supreme Soviet abolishes special administration... Azerbaijan authority restored with guarantees of local autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh... protests continue.</i>
June/July 1988	<i>Azeris reject Armenian parliament's call for Moscow rule of Nagorno-Karabakh... successive demonstrations of 500,000 in Baku and Yerevan... party leaders replaced in Armenia and Azerbaijan.</i>	January 1990	<i>Radicals gain control of Azeri Peoples' Front... radicals foment large demonstrations on Soviet-Iranian border, pogroms against Armenians, and plan coup against republic leadership.</i>
October/November 1988	<i>Violence resumes in Nagorno-Karabakh, regime declares a state of emergency... riots break out in smaller cities of Azerbaijan.</i>	15 January 1990	<i>Emergency situation declared in Nagorno-Karabakh... Soviet troops sent in at republic leaders' request.</i>
January 1989	<i>Special administration established in Nagorno-Karabakh under committee directly accountable to Moscow.</i>	20 January 1990	<i>Soviet troops assault Baku against wishes of republic leadership... over 140 Azeris killed.</i>
July 1989	<i>Communal violence resumes in Nagorno-Karabakh... armed Azeri vigilante bands block roads between villages and to Armenia.</i>	Spring 1990	<i>Interethnic violence continues... small-scale attacks on Soviet troops in Armenia and Azerbaijan also widespread.</i>
